

Lead



In the District of Columbia

Fact Sheet

What Are the Health Effects of Lead?

Lead can pose a significant risk to health if too much of it enters your body. Even small amounts of lead can be harmful if swallowed or inhaled. If lead accumulates in the body over many years, it can cause damage to the brain, red blood cells, and kidneys.

Lead from chipping and flaking paint, if ingested, can cause significant health impacts especially for small children.

Lead in drinking water, although rarely the sole cause of lead poisoning, can significantly increase a person's total lead exposure, particularly the exposure of infants who drink baby formulas and concentrated juices that are mixed with water. The EPA estimates that drinking water can make up 20 percent or more of a person's total exposure to Lead.

Should My Child Be Screened?

In general, all high-risk children need lead screening. Children, under the age of 6 may be at high risk if he or she:

- lives in an area that has a high number of older homes (built before 1950),
- lives in or regularly visits a home built before 1950,
- lives in or regularly visits a home built before 1975 that has recently been remodeled,
- has had a brother or sister with lead problems, or
- Resides in an area with reported elevated lead level in water.

What Else Can I Do to Protect My Child?**In your kitchen you can:**

- Feed your child a well-balanced diet that's high in iron, calcium and vitamin C – it helps protect

the body against lead.

- Don't store food in open cans.
- Don't use pottery for cooking or serving if you're unsure about its glaze.
- Have your water tested.

WASA and EPA Suggest:

- Draw water for drinking or cooking after other high water use activities, such as bathing, showering, flushing the toilet, or washing your clothes, so that a total of at least 10 minutes of flushing water from your lead service pipes has occurred.
- Flush your kitchen tap for 60 seconds, then collect drinking water in containers and store them in the refrigerator. About once a month, remove and clean the strainer/aerator device on your faucet to remove debris.
- Cold water should be used for drinking or cooking, as hot water will contain higher levels of lead. Cold water should be heated for making hot beverages or cooking. Do not use the water from the hot water faucet for drinking or cooking.

In your home you can:

- Be alert for chipping and flaking paint.
- Use only safe interior paints on toys, walls, furniture, and other items.
- Replace plastic blinds made outside the U.S. with a type that is lead-free.

With your child:

- Don't allow your child to put things in his or her mouth that may be dirty or have paint on them.
- Keep children from chewing window sills or other painted surfaces.
- Don't allow your child to eat snow or icicles.
- Wash children's hands often, especially before they eat and before nap time and bedtime.
- Keep play areas clean. Wash bottles, pacifiers, toys, and stuffed animals regularly.
- Make sure children eat nutritious, low-fat meals high in iron and calcium, such as spinach and dairy products. Children with good diets absorb less lead.

For More Information Call:
202.535.2626



Government of the
District of Columbia
Anthony A. Williams, Mayor

GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
DOH
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
James A. Buford, Director

If you work with lead:

- Don't bring it home with you.
- Shower and change before coming home.
- Wash your clothes separately from your family's clothes.
- Follow all occupational safety guidelines for cleaning and storing work clothes and equipment.

What You Can Do Now To Protect Your Family

If you suspect that your house has lead hazards, you can take some immediate steps to reduce your family's risk:

- If you rent, notify your landlord of peeling or chipping paint.
- Clean up paint chips immediately.
- Clean floors, window frames, window sills, and other surfaces weekly. Use a mop or sponge with warm water and a general all-purpose cleaner or a cleaner made specifically for lead.
REMEMBER: NEVER MIX AMMONIA AND BLEACH PRODUCTS TOGETHER SINCE THEY CAN FORM A DANGEROUS GAS.
- Thoroughly rinse sponges and mop heads after cleaning dirty or dusty areas.
- Clean or remove shoes before entering your home to avoid tracking in lead from soil.

How Does Lead Enter Our Drinking Water?

Lead is unusual among drinking water contaminants in that it seldom occurs naturally in water supplies like rivers and lakes. Lead enters drinking water primarily as a result of the corrosion, or wearing away, of materials containing lead in the household plumbing and water service lines. These materials include lead-based solder used to join copper pipe,

brass, and chrome-plated brass faucets, and in some cases, pipes made of lead that connect your house to the water main (service lines). In 1986, Congress banned the use of lead solder containing greater than 0.2% lead, and restricted the lead content of faucets, pipes and other plumbing materials to 8.0%.

Are There Screening Measures Available?

The level of lead in your child's blood can be measured, and early detection means early intervention. Measures include:

- A blood test can reveal if there's an elevated level of lead in your child's blood.
- A second blood test is usually done if a child's screening shows that lead may be present. X-rays and other tests may be necessary.
- Follow-up questions will be asked to learn about the child's behavior, health, and symptoms; anything the child has chewed on or swallowed; possible sources of lead; the child's diet; and/or family medical history.
- Other measures may include home inspection for lead sources, or counseling about how to protect children.

What Actions Can I Take to Reduce Exposure to Lead in Drinking Water?

Despite our best efforts mentioned earlier to control water corrosivity and remove lead from the water supply, lead levels in some homes or buildings can be high. To find out whether you need to take action in your home, have your drinking water tested to determine if it contains excessive concentrations of lead. Testing the water is essential because you cannot see, taste, or smell lead in drinking water.

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